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SENSITIVE
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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE. NSC FOR SHAPIRO/KUMAR. JOINT STAFF
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: MOD SAYS NO MASS OUTPOST EVACUATION PLANNED,
DESPITE SECURITY FORCE TRAINING

REF: TEL AVIV 1656

1. (SBU) On 23 July, Amos Gilad, director of the MOD's Political Military Bureau, told Ambassador that recent Israeli press reports inaccurately stated that the MOD is planning a one-day mass evacuation of outposts (reftel). From 21-22 June, Ha'aretz reported that the MOD had formulated a plan, approved by PM Netanyahu, to evacuate 23 post-March 2001 outposts. The reports further claimed that Border Police, Civil Police and the IDF held joint exercises two weeks ago to prepare for the pending operation. IDF and Police spokespersons immediately denied the existence of any such plan. Gilad opined that the press claims were meant to agitate and galvanize pro-settler groups and prevent ongoing IDF operations against illegal outposts. He acknowledged that security forces are actively training for outpost evacuations, but said that no plan yet been formulated. Gilad also expressed frustration with the politicization of the issue, and stressed that the evacuations of outposts is a matter of law and order.

Could Such a Plan Work?

2. (SBU) LTC (res) Ron Shatzberg from the Economic Cooperation Foundation told EconOff on 22 July that such a plan may exist, contrary to the denials of the security establishment, and expressed optimism that a large scale evacuation, if undertaken, could succeed. He provided a map showing locations of the outposts in question and their populations, and opined that a large-scale operation could spread settler groups thin and frustrate their efforts to protest or block evacuations. Moreover, since most of the outposts are on hilltops, Shatzberg explained that security forces would have an easier time controlling access to the sites. Shatzberg said that the most difficult part of any such operations would be dealing with settler violence and vandalism targeting Palestinians, and expressed concern that security forces would less likely be prepared to effectively deal with such actions. (Note: The aforementioned map can be viewed in the "Reporting Attachments" folder on Embassy Tel Aviv's classified website at <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/telaviv/>. End note.)

3. (SBU) Shatzberg asserted that to achieve greatest success, security forces must remove all caravans from the West Bank, raze permanent structures, and find a way to render infrastructure (roads, water and electrical access, etc.) unusable. When Econoff asked about speculation that the IDF is worried about significant numbers of soldier refusing to participate in such an operation, Shatzberg, who served in Gaza during the disengagement, expressed confidence that the rank and file will carry out their orders, and that the IDF

will find alternate duties for those deemed at high risk for refusal.

Settler Groups Prepared to Oppose Evacuations

14. (U) Settler groups recently established a command center to help identify imminent evacuations and mobilize their supporters. Ha'aretz reported and Shatzberg confirmed to EconOff that settlers have posted signs throughout the West Bank asking anyone who observes unusual movements by security forces to call a 24-hour outpost hotline. Shatzberg called the hotline and verified that it is up and running.

15. (SBU) Comment: We would expect the MOD/IDF to deny the existence of a large-scale evacuation plan even if it existed. However, if they do plan a mass evacuation, security forces have certainly lost the element of surprise. Nonetheless, as LTC (res) Shatzberg noted, because of the geographic spread and terrain of the outposts, settler groups would likely have a difficult time staging effective protests. Moreover, the GOI's recent string of small outpost evacuations has likely given them some insight to the likely response of settlers. The lessons learned from these small-scale operations raise serious concerns, since settler response has been heavily focused against the persons and property of Palestinians (which the settlers refer to as their 'price tag' policy). In our upcoming meetings with MOD we plan to emphasize this concern, while stressing that that if such a plan exists and is acted upon, it would confirm the rule of law in Israel and Israel's commitment to the Road Map.

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